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Teaching & Learning Bulletin
volumeone
2003

To Learn, Unlearn & Relearn

A moment with Prof Rashid Abdullah
Unimas DVC (Academic)

Understanding Quality Assurance in UNIMAS

Lessons From The Willow:
Translating Positive Parenting Skills to Cultural Perspectives on the Philosophy of Education

The Biggest Word in The Unimas Classrooms: The EMS

High Tech In Higher Ed:
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Staying Ahead of The Herd:
Maximizing E-Learning at FCSIT

intro-version

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UNIMAS

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Everyone is invited to contribute articles, reviews, events, news on campus teaching-learning issues. All contributions must be submitted to Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia (CALM), UNIMAS.

Introductory Notes

INSIGHT Bulletin 1/2003

The Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia (CALM) is very pleased to launch this inaugural issue of **INSIGHT**.

This bulletin is produced by CALM to present issues on teaching and learning in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. This is a quarterly bulletin which is dedicated to capture ideas, experiences and conceptual thoughts about higher education, particularly in the context of teaching and learning in UNIMAS.

In this first issue of the bulletin, we present a range of writings by our very own academic staff, who gave us multiple perspectives about how instruction is carried out at their own faculties. Since most faculties have gone through training on how to use E-Learning, as a means to enhance classroom instruction, most articles presented in this issue are centred on the use of online education at their faculties.

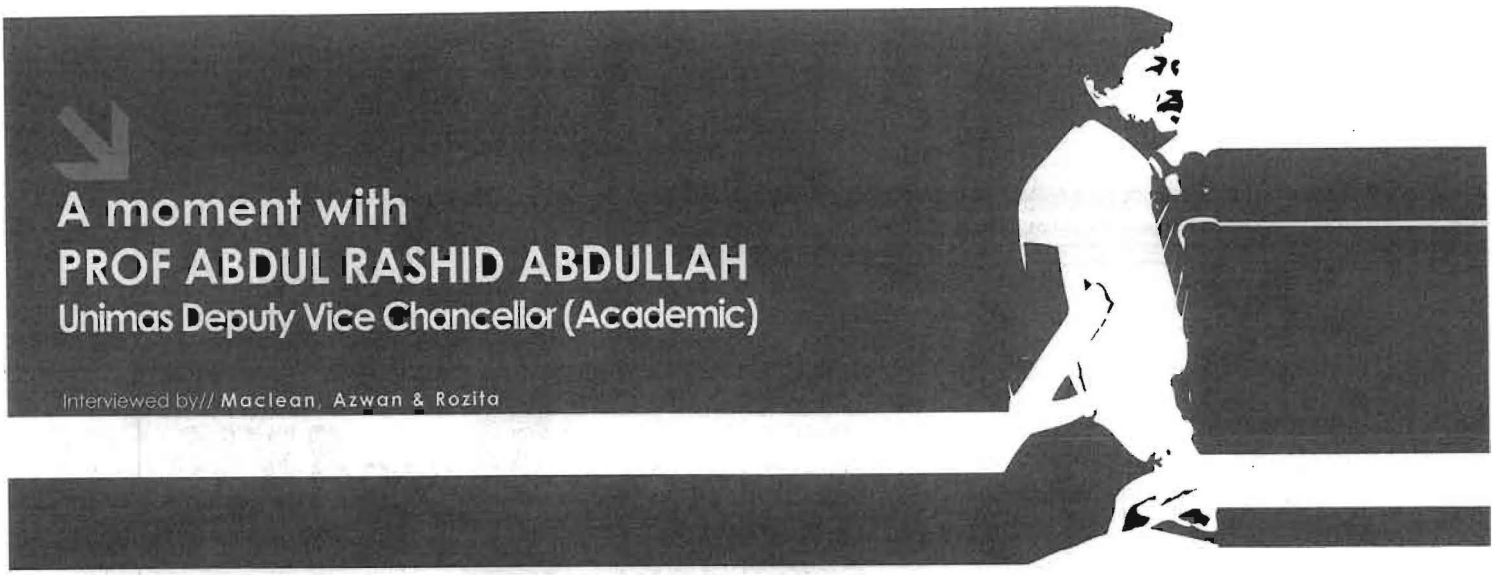
However, the centrepiece for this issue is on the interview with our Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Professor Dr Abdul Rashid Abdullah. This bulletin is his brainchild – and he intends it as a platform for us, the academic community of Unimas, to share and communicate our ideas and experiences on teaching and learning. As education is our core business at the university, this bulletin will be used as our instrument to portray our best classroom practices.

It is our hope that this issue will be an impetus for constructive collaboration among all members of our academic community in UNIMAS.

Assoc. Prof Dr Peter Songan

A moment with
PROF ABDUL RASHID ABDULLAH
Unimas Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

Interviewed by// Maclean, Azwan & Rozita



Q: Could you describe your current portfolio as the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) at the university?

: The job of the TNC Academic is to help the Vice Chancellor to develop and manage academic programmes.

The biggest task of the TNC Academic especially in a young university like Unimas, is to develop its academic programs. The quality of the university depends on the quality of the academic staff. Every single person must be of high quality. High quality people can produce high quality teaching, research works and courses.

In Unimas, I am the Chairperson for the Study Leave Committee, ead of the Expert Panel in Social Sciences and Humanity, field member of the Unimas Board of Directors, Unimas Management Committee, member of the *Lembaga Keutuhan*, Sports and Culture Council, Requisition Committee and Panel for Group 1 General Induction Course Evaluation.

I also represent Unimas as the Alternate Director for the Multimedia Technology Enhancement Operations Sdn Bhd (METEOR Sdn Bhd), and the replacement member for VC in the Malaysia Examination Council Meeting.

Q: At this point of time, what are the challenges in teaching & learning that you face in managing Unimas, so Unimas can become a viable university of choice well into the future?

A: One of the challenges of teaching and learning is the need for a good computer network and good teaching-learning environment in place to facilitate the learning process.

A good university needs to attract good students. Good students normally request for and are attracted to other learning institutions such as those in Kuala Lumpur, Penang or Johore Bahru, because they are well established. Even Sarawakians prefer to go to other places (universities) other than Sarawak because of this fact. This is a disadvantage to us, and we cannot do anything about it. The students have the right of choice and they can decide to go to any of these places.

So we cannot subscribe to the idea that, to be a good university, you must attract the top students. Let subscribe instead, to the idea of democratization of education. Forget about using the student to attract the best student. You have to make your resources the best possible in order to attract the best students. You must make sure that your academic staff is of the best quality with courses of the best quality. The best quality courses are those with quality content. We can train good lecturers in order to deliver good courses. Staff who came here may not be the best, because the best are someplace else now.

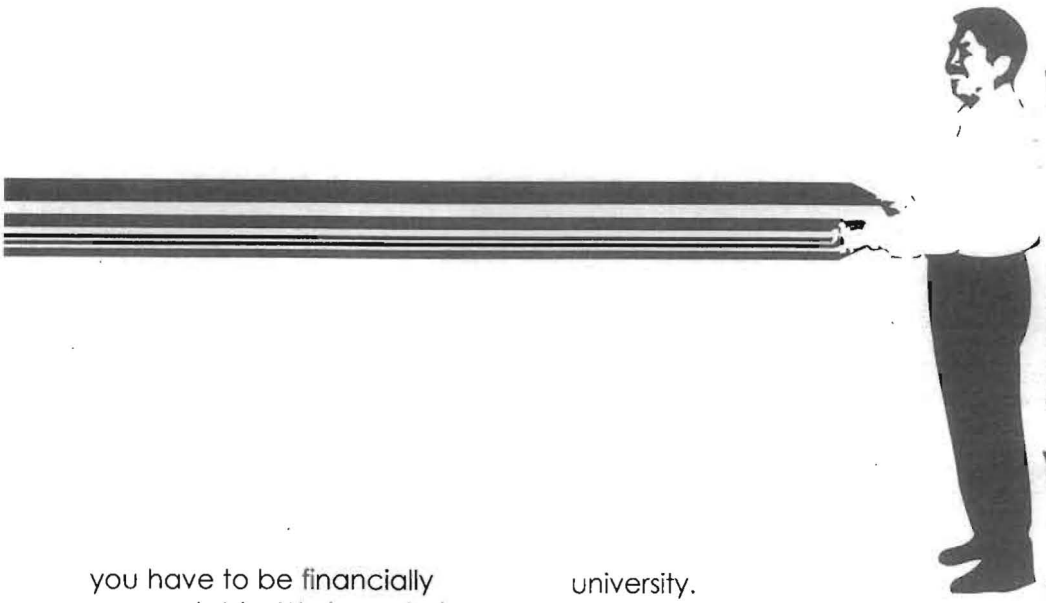
Q: Being in academia, for many years, what changes do you see in higher education since you first joined the academic world?

A: What happened in the 80's was a change in the structure of the universities. Universities have became aware of monetary resources available to them because the public are not willing anymore to simply part with their money. Instead universities had to start considering profitable ventures. Whatever the universities are responsible for the society, they would have to structure and focus their activities in very strategic ways so that they can survive. I think that is the issue we all can claim.

I still remember my university days. We used to refer to the university as the source of knowledge. We attracted the society because the society looked to us for innovations.

We have to learn to supply the society with knowledge. We can no longer monopolize knowledge. Universities can learn from the industry. That is why now, the curriculum in the universities are very closely linked to the developments in the industry. We have to ask the industry if we are doing the right things.

Another issue fundamental in any university is the awareness that



When the core businesses are of good quality or when it is of high standards then we can start calling ourselves world class providers

you have to be financially accountable. We have to be competent in managing money wisely, for we are accountable to the society because the money that we spend comes from society.

Q: What are some of the Strategic Management initiatives that the university has planned, to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in Unimas?

A: The need for quality has to be promoted among the academic staff. We want to make sure that we meet some measure of quality like; the ability to teach, the quality of courses (the courses and content), the quality of teaching and the element of knowledge.

We have revived CALM (Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia) to look into this area of quality assurance. We currently have 400 academic staff; and some of which need training in teaching-learning practices. CALM would provide such training in the form of the Post-graduate Diploma in Education for these academic staff.

Q: Being in the position to design and develop strategic management initiatives for the academic development in Unimas, what do you wish to see happen in the next five to ten years?

A: The plan for the next 2-3 years is to enhance the quality and strategic capability of the university.

Firstly, we would like to make sure the lecturers know how to teach and how to design courses, and secondly, to enhance the management of our faculties. Individuals called upon to manage the faculty must be able to manage faculty resources; managing *not* controlling.

We require a well-motivated manpower in the teaching and learning organization, who are different from other organizations. We must have high-quality teaching staff; from there we can launch quality research, quality courses and quality teaching. These are our core businesses. When the core businesses are of good quality or when it is of high standards then we can start calling ourselves world-class education providers.

So in the next 5 years, I'm going to emphasize on staff development. The first step is to provide a training module for teaching and learning. Through CALM, we will organize the Post-graduate Diploma in Education program to train our academic staff. Quality Assurance Procedures will be put in place where there will be requirements for the academics to commit themselves for peer evaluation, pertaining to their teaching. Evaluation of courses will be conducted continuously at the faculty level, and they will be audited by the Quality of Academic Assurance Unit, which was formed under the wings of the revived CALM.

Q: Prof, through your experience, can you share with us the differences between our university when compared to others?

A: We are not far behind from other universities, in terms of our knowledge about teaching and learning. We are young people with new ideas. We are not strangers to ICT. Our ICT literacy is notably higher here (in Unimas), when compared to than any place. ICT is used intensively in our teaching and learning process. Our people, who studied abroad in the 90's and those who have come back, do possess ICT experience in places where ICT is used intensively in teaching and learning, so they came back here with no more inhibitions towards ICT.

Also, they come back with ideas of improving teaching and learning. In that sense, I think we are not behind from the other universities, and we have the potential to be better because of the youthfulness of our staff members.

We have to work harder to be the best in our fields. We also have to run faster in order to be on the same stage with the others, and I hope we all can motivate one another to improve our own standing as an academic, and also the standing of our university.

High Tech in Higher Ed: How E-Learning works in Unimas

By//Fitri Suraya Mohamad

In 2000, Prime Minister Mahathir was quoted to say, *"the k-economy (knowledge economy) is all about learning, and that it would be easy to acquire knowledge as long as Malaysians are prepared to learn from one another and the world"*. Without learning, no civilization will advance in their way of life. Without the sharing of knowledge, no individual or group of communities will expand on their potentials and competencies.

How does E-Learning fit into a public university like Unimas? Before we discuss the planning and deployment aspects of this technology application, let's look at the way E-Learning is defined, in the context of higher education.

For the most part, E-Learning has been defined and accepted as any learning or training initiative that uses web-based application. It is promised to capitalize on the advancements in Internet technologies. In brief, it is an alternative and dynamic strategy to learning. It allows for exchange of ideas and understanding through a network of peers, using the flexibility of web-based technologies. It promotes communication and collaboration, at the speed and scale determined by individuals on a specific learning program. E-Learning is more than merely replacing instructors with computers. It can include classroom learning; informal learning; On-the-Job Training (OJT); learning in complex organizations, corporate settings, and across physical boundaries. Learning is expanded beyond the four physical walls of the classroom.

If we did a search on E-Learning on any search engine today, we will get hundreds of thousands of hits - mostly on things related to E-Learning in the corporate sectors. Most E-Learning users tend to expect computer-based training materials, which essentially are made up of page-turning formats of custom-made mass-produced materials.

E-Learning at Unimas, however, takes on a different twist in character and it is poised to become the incentive to provide a more practical, systematic set of change strategies to create a new, technologically competitive academic organization. In Unimas, E-Learning plays the role of the supplementary medium to support existing teaching-learning processes. The materials are created as per needed basis, and no one course in Unimas uploads entire course contents onto the web, for self-paced learning.

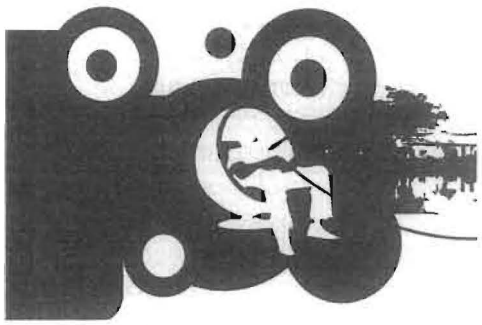
The new skills and competency requirements of the emerging information society arise from the rapid and systemic changes in work, education, leisure and society. Knowledge will be, and in many areas already is, the most critical resource for social and economic development. As a consequence of these changes in western societies, educational institutions and training systems need to develop new pedagogical and cognitive models and practices, as well as new technologies in order to cope with the challenges of the emerging knowledge society. These challenges cannot be met without the restructuring of learning delivery and E-Learning could be a key driver of this change.

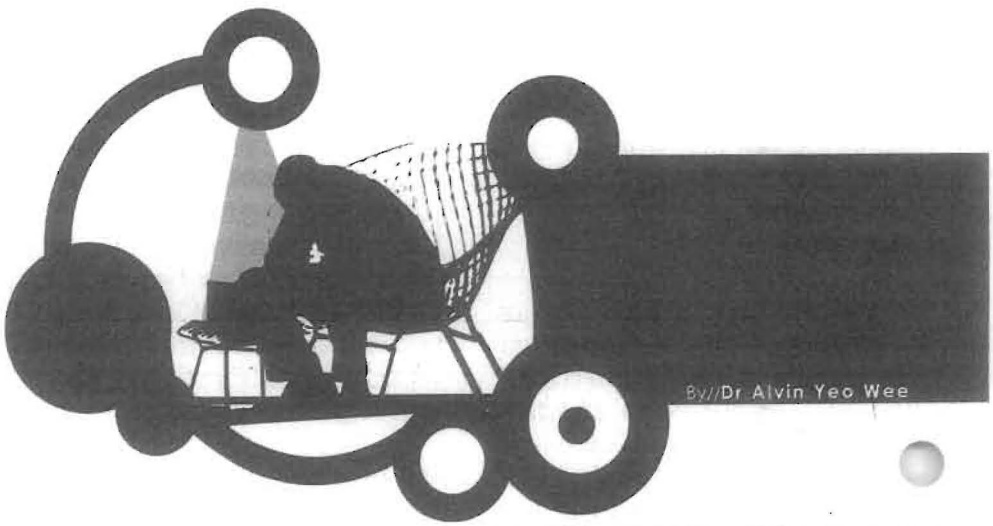
However, this will require changes in both teaching and learning methods, as E-Learning almost inevitably introduces a more interactive and learner-centric way of learning into classroom environments. High quality educational content is needed for everyday use in order to inspire and motivate both teachers and learners. However, the digital educational market has only just started to emerge, and innovative models of co-operation between the public and private sectors are still being sought and explored, to enhance the continuing development of this market.

Learning structures in any learning environment must consider balanced diet of mentor accessibility, face-to-face instructors, and group interaction. In a phrase: real people. In the business world, learning is considered an investment in human capital. It's not financially sound to deny the potential of face-to-face learning or of computer-augmented learning. The objective is to do the best you can with what you have.

Research has already also shown that online groups proved to be more innovative than its face-to-face peers. Eliminating biases of gender, age, and race apparently allowed the online learners to work together more effectively. Some first-hand experiences illustrated how online learning sometimes worked better for individual learners, especially in global businesses that must overcome language barriers, cultural prejudices, and learning styles. The emerging economies need for speed challenges many companies to keep their sales and service

Learning structures in any learning environment must consider balanced diet of mentor accessibility, face-to-face instructors, and group interaction.





By//Dr Alvin Yeo Wee

Staying ahead of the herd: Maximizing E-Learning at FCSIT

This is a story about E-Learning at the faculty that leads the technology vision on campus – the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology. It depicts the experienced advantages of employing online technologies. In particular, examples in online teaching and learning, assessment and administration will be highlighted. Let's begin our story with the tools we used.

Since the mid-1990s, courses taught at FCSIT have had some form of online presence. The word *'online'* means that the materials are accessible via a web browser, such as *Netscape*. Most of these course materials were created using *PowerPoint* and stored on *HyperWave*, a knowledge management system, as well as published in html format, and the like, on the Internet. For the more adventurous colleagues at the faculty, they also created course lectures using tools that came with *HyperWave*. Today, the majority of FCSIT courses still reside on a newer version of *HyperWave*; and of late, some courses have migrated to *QuickPlace*, like everyone else on campus.

Lecture notes of most FCSIT courses are prepared electronically, and are provided online to students. Prior to the availability of notebooks and data projectors in lecture rooms as we have today, lecturers lugged the common presentation equipment to

teams ahead of the game - classroom learning can't keep pace, and one-on-one learning doesn't scale.

As suppliers of human resource in this competitive digital information age, universities must have their very own E-Learning systems, just to keep performing at par with market demands.

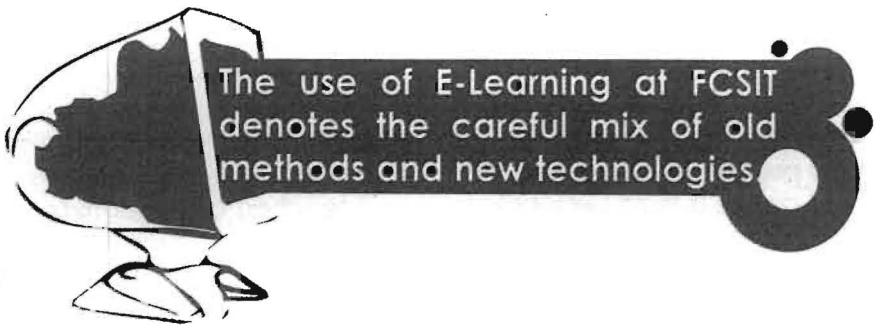
The use of technology, particularly web-based technologies, in our efforts to integrate E-Learning into our academic system at Unimas, is a strategy to address weaknesses in and to provide advantages over the current conventional system of teaching at the university. Such use of technology inevitably will require some adjustments and restructuring of the conventional teaching and learning environment at the Unimas. It must also be made clear that, with the integration of E-Learning principles in our current academic system, it will not jeopardize the core functions of the university, i.e. in teaching, research and public services. However, the core values of the university need to be served in a rapidly changing world, and we now need to find ways to respond to the growing demand for life long learning, especially in the era where technology is becoming more accessible to many. By devising and deploying the appropriate strategies to use technology in teaching, we hope to make learning more cost-effective, and we will all become a more able group of academics who can prepare our students better for a dynamic technology-literate society.

lecture halls, while others just opted to print out the notes on transparencies. Providing the notes online allowed students to access and use the classroom materials to prepare for lectures as well as for reference after each lecture session. Making notes available electronically is also beneficial to students enrolled in first year programming courses, such as *Introduction to Computing*, or *Data Structures and Algorithms*, which uses C and C++ respectively. In these courses, lecturers are able to provide example source code (program code) in their lecture notes, which students can copy and test run during their lab sessions. By running the example code, students not only see how the program works, but they can also enhance their understanding by making changes to the sample code, and thus able to observe how the changes affect the workings of the program studied. Simulations of the running of algorithms, for example, sorting algorithms, are also provided to students. These simulations allow students to visualise how the algorithm works. For courses such as *Interactive Computer Graphics* or *Multimedia System Development*, animation clips are presented during class to reinforce students' understanding of the methods and use of codes applied in the development of animation.

Besides lecture notes, other course resources like tutorial questions, assignment questions and answers, are also provided online. This eliminates the need to provide photocopies of the required materials to students (and especially with many classes of more than a hundred students, many trees have probably been saved along the way!). With regards to hand-ins, students normally pass up their work on diskettes or as hard copies. Files/documents that cannot fit on a diskette can also be handed in by uploading (copying) their work into folders on *HyperWave* or onto *QuickPlace*. Lecturers can then view such work online by accessing the folders.

From a course administration perspective, the deployment of courses has also been made easier with the online presence of the courses. For example, lecturers make announcements - reminders of tests, assignment or project deadlines, postponement of lectures, either online and/or on the faculty's (physical) notice board. Students, especially those who are residing off-campus, prefer the online announcements, as they can check the announcements without the fuss to physically be on campus to check on the course calendars for updates on the notice board. Likewise, lecturers can post announcements even while there are on a traveling assignment thousands of miles away. Besides common calendar notices and traveling notices put online, the students' current marks accumulated (to date) are also placed online. One observation gathered from the practice of putting up course information online is that, these online learning environments motivate students to study harder especially before the final examination. Carry marks, the marks the students have achieved thus far prior to the final exam, are usually displayed online or on the faculty's notice board. These marks, accessible not only to the students but also to their friends usually encourage them to perform better at the final examination especially if their marks are tethering at the borderline of a B+/A- grade, or at a pass/fail grade

Assessments for some courses are also conducted online. An example of this assessment is the IT Placement Test. Students who would like to be exempted from the generic IT Literacy courses are encouraged to take up this test. If they pass, they are exempted from the generic course called *TMX1011 End User Computing*. The test is conducted online, before or at the start of the semester. Using this method, only students, who are not computer-literate, or require an upgrade of their skills, need to take the course. This practice saves on course resources, which can be put to better use in other areas of academic development.



The use of E-Learning at FCSIT denotes the careful mix of old methods and new technologies. On the whole, there are advantages in providing the courses online and the process of getting and having them online, in general, has relatively been a painless process. However, as many have experienced before with computing technologies, there have been glitches in the deployment phase (these are issues which probably will be addressed in another article on *Lessons Learnt*). In addition, courses at FCSIT will be continually improved, to strive for the dynamic interactivity of online courses, as demonstrated in the recent Online Education Seminar held in October last year. Like the other faculties on campus, FCSIT will meet the challenges head on, by keeping abreast and adopt suitable state-of-the-art technologies to ensure that E-Learning in Unimas is a success.

LESSONS FROM THE WILLOW: TRANSLATING POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS FROM THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The idea to write this article came about while doing a translation of works in English for a colleague, Gill Raja, who was working on a community project called *"Positive Parenting"*. One of the articles to be translated used an archaic Malay proverb, which goes: *"it's better to bend the willow when it is young"*, or in its Bahasa Malaysia form: *"Melentur buluh biar dari rebung"*. Looking at the use of the proverb in the context of the translated article, we decided to expand on the meaning, in a context of education in our culture.

In Gill Raja's article *"Correcting, not punishing, is the aim"*, she interpreted the proverb as *"the expectations of parents wanting obedience at at the price of breaking their children's spirit"*. In the context of her project, the parents, to a certain degree, 'successfully' produced such obedient children. However, the consequence of educating children through this way will simply produce individuals who would posses a timid personality. Furthermore, the article suggests that the obedience shown by these children is the result of their fear toward authority. Indeed, this is a western/ individualistic perspective of educating the young in our culture.

However, the common interpretation of this proverb in our society is that educating children must start when they are still young. At a tender age, the young children are expected to abide to what is taught by their parents or teachers. This proverb captures the philosophy of educating in the informal and formal settings, in terms of promoting a set of attitudes and behaviors to the young. If we look from the temporal or physical perspectives, there is no debate about how any being can easily be changed and directed in the early stage of its formation. However, in the context of this article, the argument is not centred on this point of view. The core of the issue here is the process of educating the young, which stresses on how children could be molded with certain sets of attitudes and behaviors as they grow up.

In our culture, generally, our children are seen as the *"bamboo"*, which can be easily *"shaped"*. Thus, young children of our culture are taught about numerous collectivism characteristics, such as to respect the elders, to obey, to be patient, to *"save face"*, to conform the to norms, and so o many occasions. children are typically disallowed or discouraged to show disagreement or any form of confrontation. Instead, they are expected to abide to what is taught to them. What this means is, through this type of parenting and educating, both parents and teachers are responsible in determining the children's goals. To the parents and teachers, they are responsible to instill as many sets of acceptable attitudes and behaviors as possible, whilst the children are still young. When they are adults, just like the nature of the *"bamboo"*, it is a harder task to *"bend"* on these individuals. Nevertheless, some parents especially those who are highly educated, tend to be more flexible in the degree of instilling these acceptable attitudes and behaviours in their children.

Among the growing pains that our children will endure are the need to comply and abide to the many things expected of them, for their parents, teaching, peers, and the society in general. As they take their first steps to

Before the university, these students were taught with the philosophy of the bending bamboo, at home and also in their primary and secondary education.

primary school education, and later at secondary school level, these children are anticipated to fulfill their parents' expectations in academia, as well as play their roles in the society they live in, as a way to *"fit"* into the basic foundation of the society.

As these children grow, they may discover the differences they could make in life, but at times, with the dictated expectations about how they should think, behave and respond, from values instilled in them when they were young, these young individuals might restrain themselves from doing or achieving certain benchmarks of success. Therefore, it is not surprising to find many students at the higher learning institutions that are passive and lacking motivation to succeed. This certainly contradicts the teaching-learning expectations in a university environment, which essentially prescribes to a more individualistic approach in education.

The institutions of higher learning tend to expect more of the abilities, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes from their students, if compared to the primary and secondary education levels. Today, lecturers seek for a more dynamic interactive lecturer-student relationships. Lecturers prefer their students to possess self-regulated characteristics, which could push them to use, give out suggestions, and express opinions in class discussions, instead of simply conforming to the words of others. Lecturers want students who are proactive, creative and innovative, and definitely not passive. Above all, lecturers prefer students who are individualistic, yet at the same time possess strong collectivism characteristics.

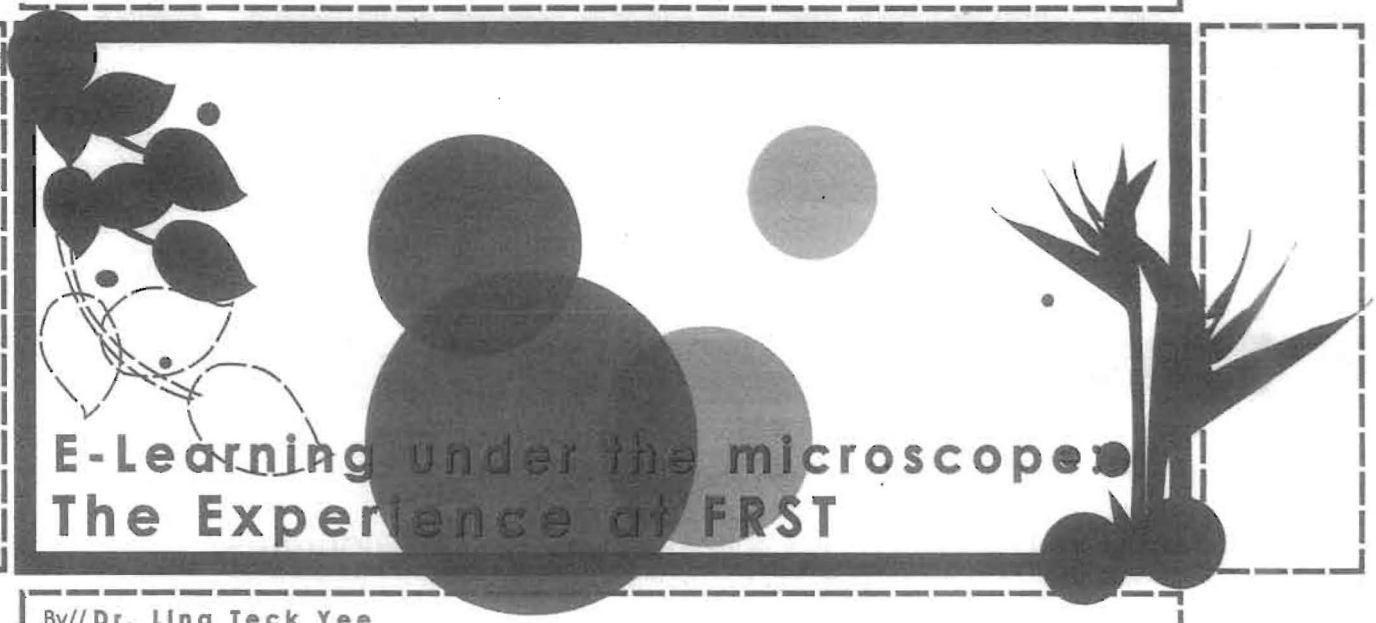
Hence, the teaching and learning process at the university creates a paradoxical expectation of the students. Before the university, these students were taught with the philosophy of the bending bamboo, at home and also in their primary and secondary education. They are 'trained' not to be outspoken, but to listen and follow. Now, they have to slowly learn to shed the collectivism characteristics, and adapt to the new expectations to fit into the university culture. At the university, these students get opportunities to debate and voice out any disagreements and so on. However, the *"bending of the willow"* philosophy is still expected, even at university level. Respecting the elders, the idea about "saving face", the need to arrive to a consensus, and many other collectivism characteristics are still important, and they must be taught and retained as the foundation of our collectivism-centric culture.

The degree of individualistic characteristics must be integrated to a certain level...

Lecturers and students therefore need to be aware of the underlying cultural philosophy of education in our society, and how it is played in the contradicting expectations and settings in higher education. Students at the university need to adjust and adapt their attitudes, behaviors and way of thinking, to meet the needs and demands of higher learning. The degree of individualistic characteristics must be integrated to a certain level, to support the expectation of teaching - learning at the university.

As lecturers, we need to give our students the support and encouragement, especially those in the first year of venturing in the higher learning. This can be done not only through the conventional approach of face-to-face consultation, but also through the state-of-the-art communication tools we have today.

By// Siti Zanariah Ahmad Ishak & Siti Haslina Hj Husin



E-Learning under the microscope: The Experience at FRST

By// Dr. Ling Teck Yee

When the IT-oriented Unimas came into being in 1993, the majority of us were computer illiterate. The idea of using E-Learning was the goal right from the start for the university curriculum, but we had to overcome the obstacles of computer illiteracy and phobia first. Now, almost 10 years older, and 10 years wiser, we can laugh at our good old days of fearing of "*loss*" of all our documents when the screen saver came on, or whenever we accidentally pressed the wrong keys or icons. Once upon a time, not too long ago, there was no 'word wrap' tool in MS Word, and we had to use our own wisdom to judge whether there was enough room at the end of a line to complete the words we were typing. We were appreciative to Unimas for providing us with a desktop computer each, and for offering training programs to help us start off in the IT era. On top of that, some of us even bought our own laptops (that had cost more than RM10,000.000 10 years ago) with the loans made available by the university. We were an unselfish and motivated 'bunch', teaching one another word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation tools, plus simple PC trouble-shooting strategies.

Right from the start, we digitized our lecture notes. Due to the lack of LCD projector, most lectures were delivered using OHP from slide printouts. In July of 2001, three of our colleagues embarked on online teaching and learning for the courses they were teaching, using Quickplace, a software application hosted by CALM. To date, we have a total of 67 (57%) courses online and 87% of our colleagues are already involved in handling online courses. At the moment the role of online learning in our faculty is both complementary and supplementary to the conventional face-to-face classroom teaching and learning. Most of the courses are presented on *PowerPoint* slides, where students can access whenever and wherever they are. Lecture notes in *Microsoft Word* format are also made available. Communications in the form of class announcements, and the exchange of ideas and resources took place online. Group projects and assignments are conducted and submitted online too. As for courses involving mathematics or statistics, the theories were presented in *PowerPoint* slides, and examples of the problem solving aspects in the course were conducted using the regular 'chalk and talk' method, which was observed to provide students with better learning experience until better courseware design is put in place.

As an increasing number of student intake affected our course registry, which have grown to sizes of over a hundred students per class, it was convenient to make announcements, post assignments and other information at any time, without having to delay or wait until the actual class time. Images in the lesson content were easily incorporated. As many students were residing off-campus, they had the flexibility of accessing information at any time from their own homes. During lecture sessions, students did not have to rush copying notes. As such, they were able to focus more on the content of the lesson. More effective learning also took

effective learning also took place, as students were able to access the notes before the lesson, and they were able to clarify doubts about the content of the course during class time. Online learning also provided a non-threatening environment for the shy ones, introverts or academically challenged students, to express their views or to ask questions, as compared to a normal/conventional classroom setting. At times, when we were away in the field, students were still able to continue learning through the contents on *Quickplace*. From our experience, materials for learning are not limited to what we provided as there were related website that were linked to our online course website. Interaction between students occurred through their discussion on the bulletin board and also the opportunities provided by small group projects.

For the most part to lecturers, online teaching and learning is certainly a time-consuming activity but we have witnessed some good outcomes. We are by no means satisfied with our achievements. Hopefully, with further assistance from CALM, we will see learning content to be designed in highly interactive manner, through the use of more appropriate software designed with sound underlying learning theories and educational philosophies *(Ring & McMahon, 1997)*. Due to phenomenal increase in student-teacher interactions and communications, our mailboxes have frequently exceeded the allotted space. As for the students, they have consistently reported of inaccessibility to the course materials, and the limited number of computers for their use in campus. This poses a challenge to our teaching-learning infrastructure. As Malaysia implements smart learning in smart schools by using technology as the prime enabler *(Kaur, 1997)*, we at the higher institution will be getting students who are ready and eager for online learning. Therefore, we should not be unprepared for the future generation. Finally, the potential of online teaching and learning should be fully capitalized in order for us to be part of this competitive age of technology and knowledge explosion.

Acknowledgement
My gratitude to my colleagues, Prof. Wan Sulaiman Wan Harun, Dr. Liew Kang Chiang, Dr. Mustafa Abdul Rahman, , Mr. Lim Po Teen, and Mr. Micky Vincent for sharing their experiences.

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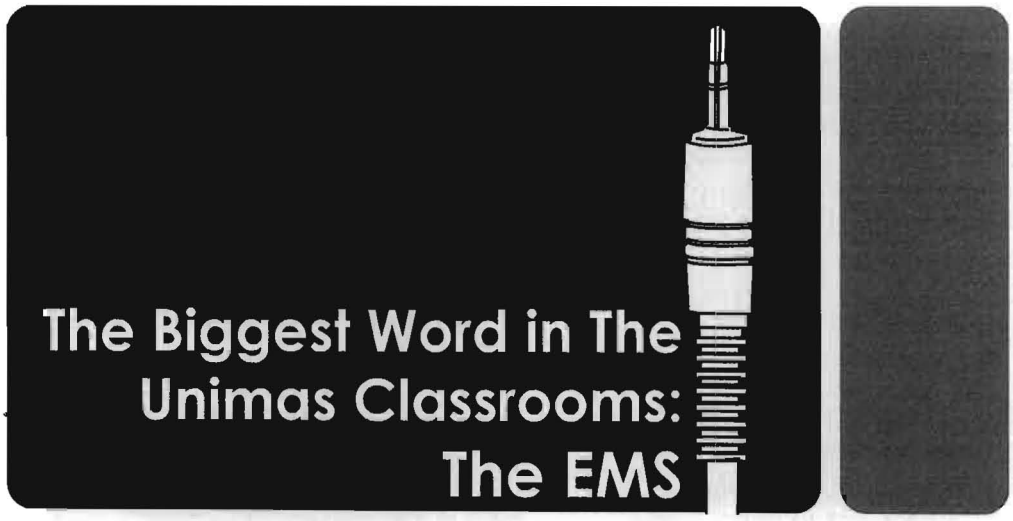
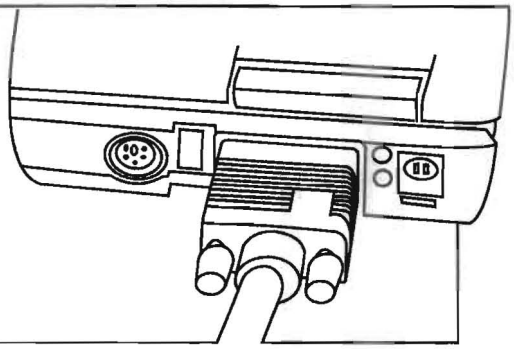


The Educational Multimedia Systems (EMS) is an integrated lecture system, made up of teaching equipment such as an LCD projector, notebook, document visualiser (that doubles as an Overhead Projector and Direct Projector) and related audio-video tools. The EMS enables technology aided teaching-learning practices to happen more frequently, in a simpler manner, and with less preparation time. In short, EMS helps introduce the usage of technology in the teaching-learning process. This is in synch with the renewed initiative within public Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia, to encourage more significant use of ICT-related skills among educators. In-directly it is hoped that this would drive a more focused technology-enhanced teaching, to help elevate the quality of teaching and learning at public universities in Malaysia.

It is remarkable to see how the EMS has become a tremendous help in the delivery of lectures and tutorials at the university.

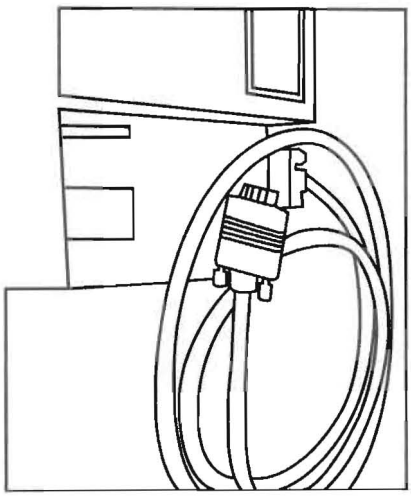


Unimas introduced the use of EMS in 2000, when 5 EMS units were installed - 2 units were placed in two seminar rooms, 2 units was allocated for two main lecture halls, and 1 unit was placed in the Multimedia theater. In 2002, 27 more units were installed in the lecture halls and seminar rooms.

The Teaching-Learning (T-L) Support Unit (in CALM) manages the technology tools in the classroom environments, and a number of support crew is assigned to assist the use of these tools. At the beginning of the academic semester, a special training session is usually held to teach the academic staff on how to use the EMS.

In an interview with the support crew at the unit, the most common reaction observed from the academic staff's usage of EMS was that they were hesitant and skeptical about the procedures to use the technology tools. One of them noted, *"It was obvious in the beginning that the academic staff were a bit apprehensive about using the EMS, but after being given training and guidance, most of them have adapted well to using it now."* Though the majority of the academic staff are now capable to handle the use of EMS in their lectures and tutorials, the T-L Support Unit is always at hand to assist in various technical issues.

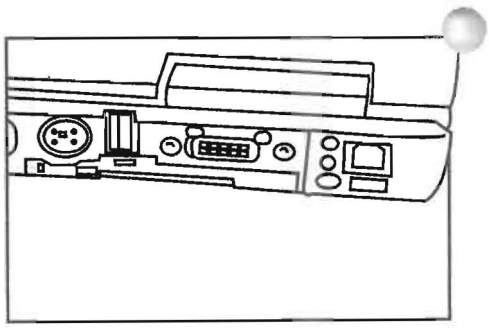
To date, the highest number of requests to use this system came from the Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human

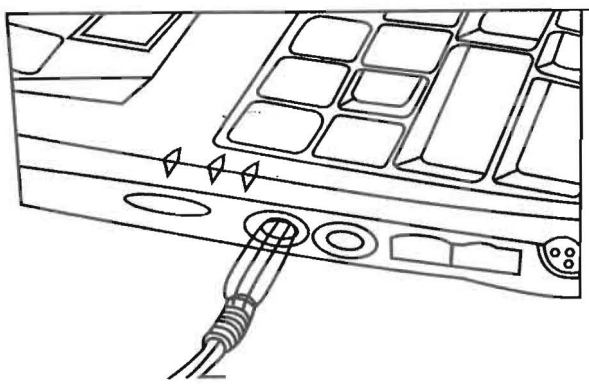


Development. One of the staff members of T-L Support Unit further added that, *"A large number of the lecturers have shown a significant improvement in their ability to use the system. This is evident as we are getting less and less requests for assistance, from the academics"*. It is remarkable to see how the EMS has become a tremendous help in the delivery of lectures and tutorials at the university.

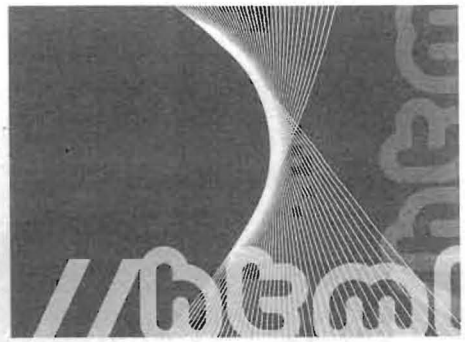
Most academics now turn up in class with just a diskette, *"handy-drive"* or a CDROM. All that is needed to commence with the class is to insert their disks into the laptops, which are made available to them on the EMS units. To those who are venturing into E-Learning, most course materials are made available online, and using these Internet-ready classrooms, the academics can effortlessly connect to their online course materials. The EMS is fully equipped to manage such interactive and engaging multimedia tasks.

By capitalizing on these state-of-the-art technology tools, Unimas has put itself ahead of the other public Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia. As a young university, we are now leapfrogging into the future of interactive digital education, which drives us to deliver a quality and effective education.





The EMS is fully equipped to manage such interactive and engaging multimedia tasks.



Tips and Tricks: Learning Basic HTML Tools

By// Maclean Patrick Sibat

HyperText Markup Language (HTML) may seem as a mystery to some people; briefly, it is the unseen force behind the creation of every webpage. It is the hidden element that basically tells a web browser where to place text, images or multimedia files on a webpage.

Contrary to popular myth, HTML is not a programming language but rather a scripting language. It is interpreted by a third party application (normally a web browser) and published in a form that is understood by users. HTML is sometimes deemed the publishing language for the World Wide Web.

HTML was originally developed by a Tim Berners-Lee in the late 80's, and was first popularized by the Mosaic browser. It has since blossomed with the explosive growth of the Internet. Just like any young language at that time, it had several conventions that led to the popular battle of the browsers, namely, *Microsoft's Internet Explorer* versus *Netscape's Navigator*. The battle has since de-solved into the annals of history where now developers and industry players alike have more or less agreed upon a standard HTML convention. The version of HTML that is currently available is version 4.01. The HTML 4.01 Specification book (a whooping 389 pages long!) can be obtained from the W3C website at *http://www.w3.org/TR/html401*.

HTML Editors

There are various HTML editors available to create web pages. These applications have taken away the hassle of coding HTML as strings of text, and replaced it with a graphical interface that you can relate to (*click and drag* menus, icons, etc). For the beginner with no working experience of web page creation, we would recommend using *Microsoft Word*. This would be an environment that is familiar to most of us, since a webpage is basically a page with information on it, just like any normal *Microsoft Word* document.

From there, you may want to start using *Microsoft FrontPage*. The environment is similar to *Microsoft Word* but with added elements such as forms, menus and table elements. Microsoft FrontPage would also help you manage and organize the whole website in a graphical way utilizing icons and click and drag features. The learning curve is not that steep so most novice users should be able to grasp it.

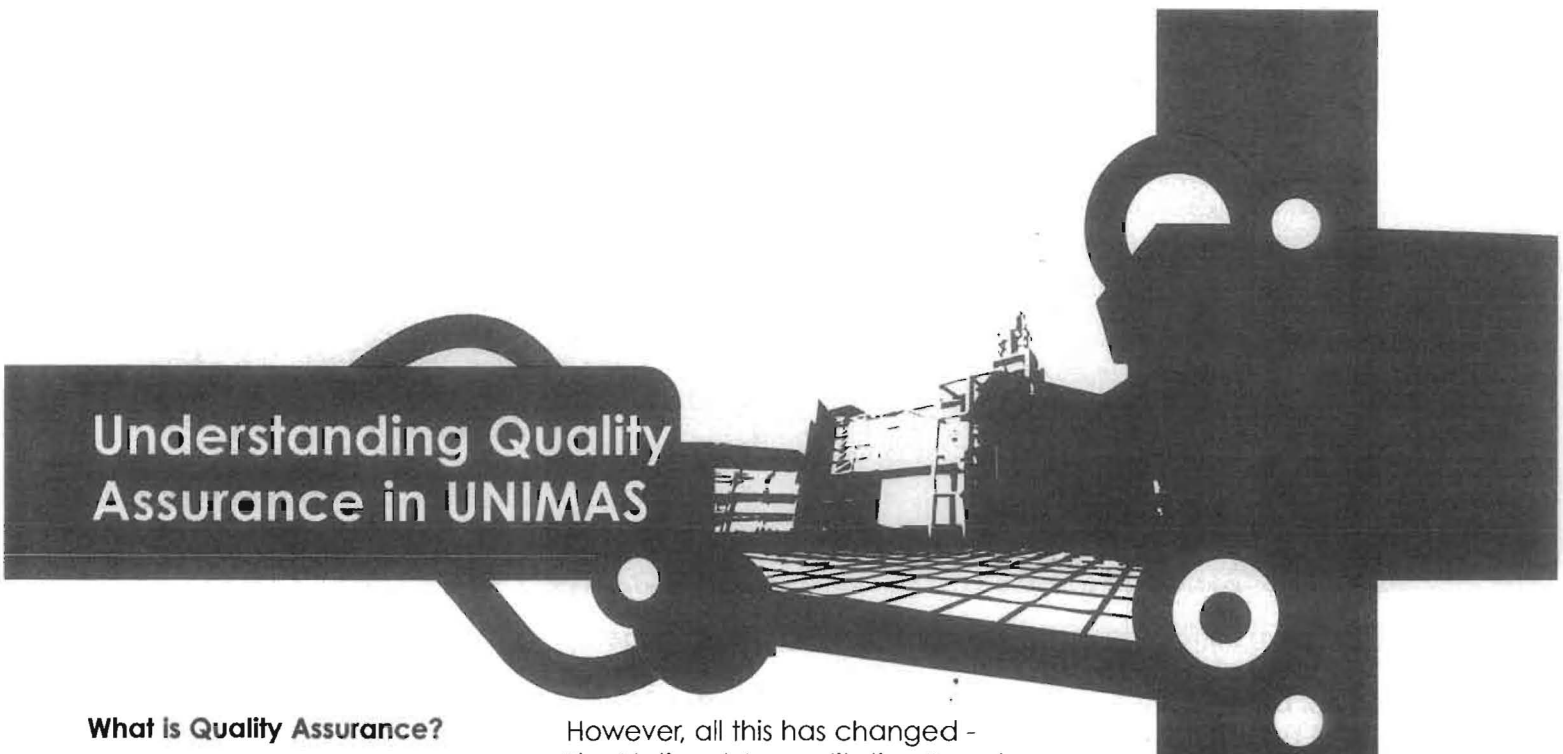
Microsoft FrontPage will serve most of your needs in putting a webpage together but for those that want a to do a bit more with their web pages, then you will need to migrate to other more advanced HTML editors. *Macromedia Dreamweaver (http://www.macromedia.com)* currently is a hot favorite among web developers, but the learning curve is slightly steeper if compared to *Microsoft FrontPage*. Among other things it can manage and organize your web pages and keep track of your links between pages.

Another HTML Editor worth looking at is *Hotdog* from *Sausage Software (http://www.sausage.com)*. Hotdog comes in three offerings: Hotdog Professional, Hotdog PageWiz and Hotdog Junior. Hotdog Junior is by far the simplest tool of the three, where you build web pages; without any knowledge of HTML; by putting together Web blocks. *Hotdog PageWiz* comes with 10 templates to choose from when creating a web page. *Hotdog PageWiz* also provides an Editor Mode in which you can manipulate the actual HTML code itself via an intuitive click and drag environment Hotdog Professional is for those with working knowledge of HTML and other popular web design languages *(CSS, ASP, PHP, VBScript and JavaScript)*. It provides text-editing support for all the above web page design languages.

Conclusion

Going for the most sophisticated tool may backfire if you do not understand what HTML can do. The trick is to start simple and gradually build your skills as you move on. The best web designers are normally those that are able to manipulate HTML beyond the norm. Try out the various tools available to build web pages and stick to one that best suits you. In all things, don't give up, because the solution could be right under your nose, or rather just a click away on your screen.

Understanding Quality Assurance in UNIMAS



By// Assoc. Prof. Dr Gabriel Tonga Noweg

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance (QA) comprises all those planned and systematic actions (policies, strategies, attitudes, procedures, and activities) necessary to provide adequate confidence that quality is being maintained and enhanced, and that the products and services meet the specified quality standards.

Academic Quality Assurance

In higher education, quality assurance is the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship and research, and of student's learning experience.

Quality Assurance in Malaysian Universities

The management of academic quality in Malaysian universities in the past had solely been the responsibility of the respective institutions. The system of quality control varies from one institution to another. However, generically the patterns or approaches used were quite similar. As there was no requirement to provide any form of rating or ranking of academic degree programs there were no apparent need for standardization of practices between these institutions of higher learning.

However, all this has changed - The National Accreditation Board (NAB) was set up in 1996 to monitor and manage quality practices in Private Institutions of Higher Learning in the country. The role of the NAB includes providing guidelines on various aspects of academic quality management practices and to conduct accreditation assessments. Today, all private Institutions of Higher Learning are now subjected to the NAB's quality assurance requirements.

In Public Institutions of Higher Learning, the need for academic quality improvement has evolved to become a more pressing issue. In the recent past, Public Institutions of Higher Learning had been wrongly perceived as academic centres that produce graduates of much lower qualities, when compared to graduates from local private institutions and also from universities abroad. Much of these perceptions stem from the fact that Public Institutions of Higher Learning are committed to the social obligation to provide opportunities to as wide a range of students as possible. Public Institutions of Higher Learning in the country are also faced with the extra burden of *"democratisation"* of educational opportunities to the general public. This is done by offering a wider spectrum of educational programs and discipline of studies at different levels of qualifications. These

being the guiding principles, students with minimum university entry requirements who are normally not accepted by Private Institutions of Higher Learning are finding their way into Public Institutions of Higher Learning.

Quality Assurance in Public Institutions of Higher Learning
In December 2001, the Quality Assurance Division (QAD) was set up in the Department of Higher Education. The mission of the division is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. This is achieved by:

conducting academic reviews to evaluate the performance of program outcomes, the quality of learning opportunities and the institutional capacity and management of standards and quality;

:: ensuring intense scrutiny and transparency of the process of academic review through the use of nationally agreed guidelines on criteria and standards, a qualifications framework and procedures for quality assurance; and

:: reporting and making available objective and independent information on the reviews.

The academic review, or commonly known as quality auditing, consists of two parts. The first part is an internal self-study whereby the institution collects and reviews data about their institution and its academic programmes. At this stage, a database is first compiled prior to the self-study report. The second stage involves an external assessment procedure. During the external assessment, a panel of assessors would conduct visits to survey the institution and scrutinize the institutional self-study report and database. The same criteria and standards are used in both the internal and external assessments.

Standards

For quality assurance assessments, a set of clearly defined and explicit standards to serve as points of reference is needed. With the set of standards, a more effective quality assurance reviews and reports on the aspiration, capabilities and performances of an academic programs and the institution be carried out.

In March 2002 the Quality Assurance Code of Practice was compiled by the QAD as a guide for Public Institutions of Higher Learning in implementing their respective quality assurance practices. The Code of Practice provides guidelines on good practices and the general requirements in nine areas or aspects in the structure and process of higher education. These nine quality areas include:

1. Vision, mission and objectives
2. Design of the educational program
3. Student assessment
4. Students
5. Academic staff
6. Educational resources
7. Program evaluation
8. Leadership and governance
9. Continuous improvement

Academic Quality Management in UNIMAS

Today, Unimas is in its tenth year of existence, and it can no longer be considered a university at its infancy stage. Physically, we are still sited on a temporary campus, but in terms of our responsibility as an academic institution, we are no different than the other Public Institutions of Higher Learning. Being the only public university in Sarawak, Unimas must play the central role in providing quality education at the tertiary level.

Academic quality assurance practices at Unimas had been the jurisdiction of the respective faculties and centres, and all their activities are monitored by the Deputy Vice Chancellor's office. Standardisation of practices was not seen as a priority then, as there were marked differences in the requirements and needs of the different faculties, in particular those academic programs, which were subjected to stringent conditions, or requirements set by their respective professional bodies. With the formal establishment of the Quality Assurance Division at the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, the need to have standard guidelines for good practices become more apparent.

Unimas set up its own Quality Assurance Management Division (QAMD) in September 2002. The Unimas QAMD was located at the Undergraduate Management office for the interim period before the revival of the Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia (CALM) in November, 2003. The Unimas QAMD is headed by CALM's Deputy Dean (QA), Associate Professor Dr. Gabriel Tonga Noweg, who was formerly the Deputy Dean (Academic) at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The Roles of CALM

The immediate role of QAMD at CALM is to communicate with the campus community about the importance of quality assurance and the needs for a more stringent quality assurance practice. As required by the QAD at the Department of Higher Education, each academic degree program will be reviewed or audited based on 35 quality aspects from the nine quality areas as mentioned earlier. Academic degree programs will be rated of its level of compliance to the set standards and criteria, as found in the Quality Assurance Code of Practice Handbook.

The specific roles of CALM (specifically the QAMD) are:

1. Conduct workshops and trainings on matters related to Quality Assurance Management
2. To assist faculties and centres

the compilation or documentation of data related to the nine quality areas, as required for program review or auditing,

3. To assist faculties and centres in preparing their respective self-study reports,
4. To coordinate the internal review process, and subsequently to coordinate external review or auditing

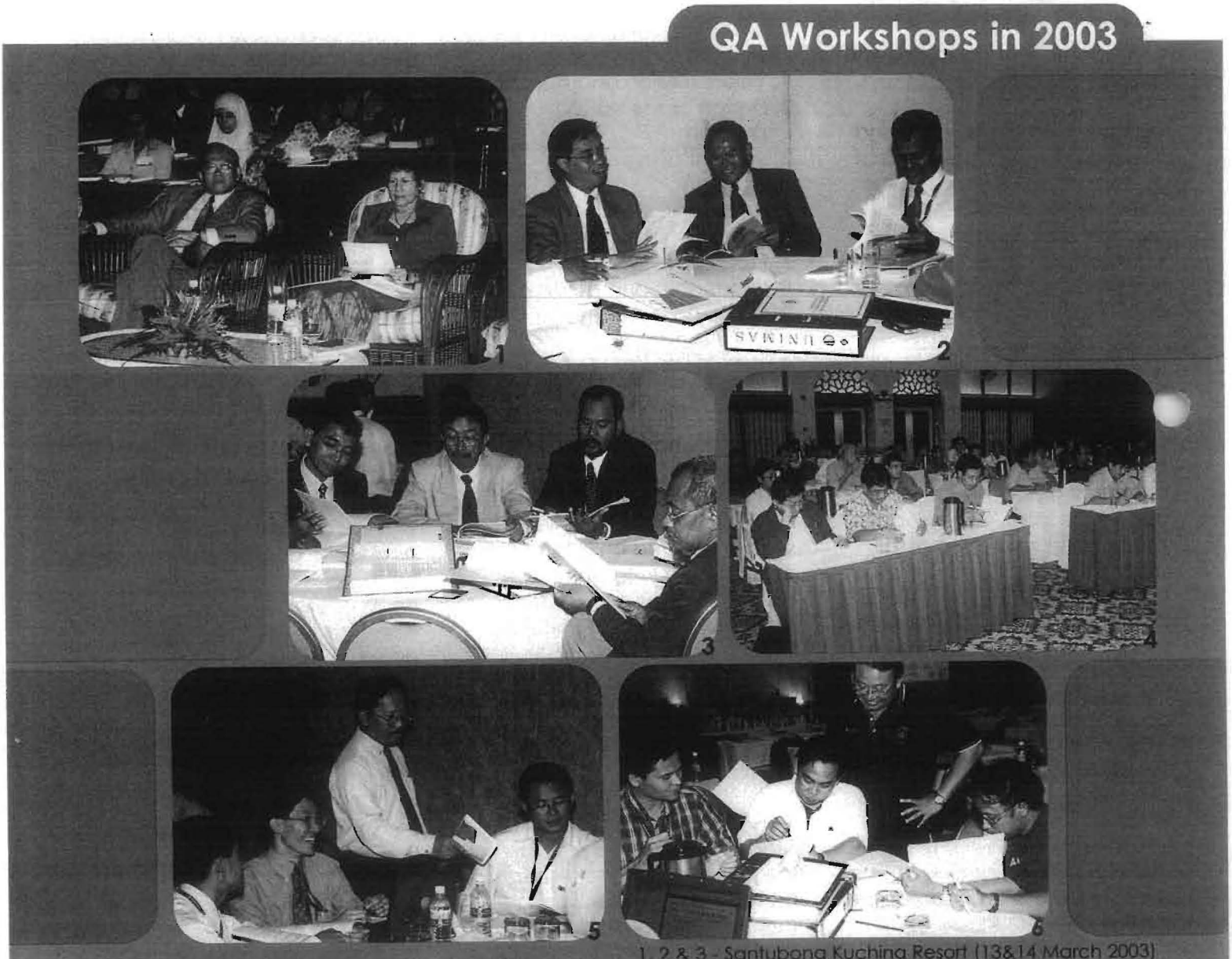
In discharging its duties with respect to quality assurance management, CALM will liaise closely with the QAD at the Department of Higher Education, MOE. To date, two Quality Assurance Workshops had been conducted for the early parts of this year. One workshop was for the Deans and Deputy Dean, and another was meant for Program Heads. The main purpose of the workshops was to provide a hands-on exercise for those who are going to be directly involved in preparing documentations for the program reviews (auditing).

Immediate Needs at Unimas

To prepare us for the review process, all faculties and centres offering degree programs are advised to start working on the documentation of all quality assurance practices and activities into a central database, following the guidelines set forth in the Quality Assurance Code of Practice handbook. Subsequently, a self-study report has to be made by all academic degree programs. These reports will need to be ready and submitted for internal auditing by the end of September 2003. It needs to be noted also that the trial review (auditing) for the Bachelor of Social Science is scheduled for July 2003. A similar trial auditing will be carried out for the Bachelor of Science (at FSTS) will follow soon afterwards.

Besides the roles described earlier, CALM will also be taking the tasks of coordinating curriculum reviews, compiling various campus wide guidelines on several aspects of quality assurance practices. These aspects will be presented and discussed at a greater length at the next issues of this bulletin.

QA Workshops in 2003



1, 2 & 3 - Santubong Kuching Resort (13&14 March 2003)
4, 5 & 6 - Damai Lagoon Resort (3&4 April 2003)